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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to analyze and apply the dramatistic criticism methods of rhetorical theorist Kenneth Burke to the evaluation of both specialized and general curricula. The study consisted of four phases: interpretation and summation of Burke's work, translation of Burke's vocabulary into an appropriate form, application and refinement of the approach, and reconsideration. This report contains a working vocabulary list and definitions as well as an abbreviated version of an evaluation report on a ninth-grade humanities curriculum newly implemented as part of a four-year, integrated core curriculum in a new private metropolitan secondary school. The vocabulary list provides definitions of the "dramatistic pentad," the five generating principles (act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose) that make up the basic elements of analysis. The evaluation report contains brief descriptions of the program to be evaluated, of the involved participants, and of the general scene; selected scenes that present summaries of the pentad elements; an epilogue of programmatic conclusions; and a discussion and reconsideration of the application of the dramatistic methods to curriculum evaluation work. The authors believe that the approach was useful in this application and could prove useful in analyzing teaching. (Author/IRT)

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THE APPLICATION OF DRAMATISTIC CRITICISM TO CURRICULUM EVALUATION

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Application of Dramatistic Criticism to Curriculum Evaluation

Curriculum evaluation has become an increasingly time-consuming and expensive component required of all local and federally funded curriculum development programs. Concurrently, educators have become aware of the limitations of traditional evaluation methods modeled after the preordinate psychometric techniques of the physical sciences. Because of the limitation of current evaluation techniques, there is a demand for a new perspective on evaluation and for new methods that will not only give information about results, but will also assess the processes of education. The study discussed here sought to examine one potentially useful method of evaluation arising from the humanities.

The study was designed to analyze and apply the dramatistic criticism method of rhetorical theorist Kenneth Burke in the evaluation of specialized and general curriculum. It further sought to assess the utility of the method as part of a repertoire of evaluation methods that can be brought to bear on a given educational program.

Perspective

The attempt to apply Burke's dramatistic criticism to curriculum evaluation is not without precedent. Eisner (1976) has introduced the techniques of art criticism; Stake (1975) has offered responsive evaluation based on ethnographic methods; Wolf and Tymitz (1977) proposed naturalistic inquiry containing elements of anthropological and sociological investigation; Grumet (1978) wrote of curriculum as theatre. A recently published collection of works on qualitative approaches to evaluation (Willis, 1978) includes a number of models and case studies in curriculum criticism. One fruitful area that has had limited exploration for use in evaluation, however, is that of rhetoric.

Rhetorical Criticism. Rhetoricians circumscribe their area of study as the Aristotelian defined "art or faculty of discovering the best possible means of persuasion in regard to any subject whatever . . . . this includes not only discourse designed for argumentation, but also to ingratiate, to arouse sympathy, to evoke indignation, and so forth" (Winterowd, 1968, p. 15). This is indeed broad, and actually subsumes literary, dramatic, and poetic criticism insofar as they may function to persuade by passion or reason. The foremost spokesman for rhetorical criticism in the 20th century has been Kenneth Burke. From his earliest works, such as Counter-Statement (1931) to his most recent, Dramatism and Development (1972), Burke has provided direction to the rhetorical anaylsis and criticism of scores of scholars in discourse. In fact, Duncan (1965) claimed that writers in many fields have used Burke without crediting him as their source and that his works have been pilfered shamelessly. Poets, critics, philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, and linguists have read and built upon Burke's arguments that "the manner in which we communicate determines the manner in which we relate as social beings" (Duncan, 1965).

For all the influence Burke's work has had on scholars throughout the disciplines, there is little indication that educators have attempted to use his contributions in analysis of curricular issues. This seems true even though the natural relationship between discourse and the educative act is apparent. Burke contributed to the 54th yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education (1955), a collected work on modern philosophies and education, but there does not appear to have been a significant response to his work. It may well be that Burke's highly unique but difficult style, and diverse, scattered works have made him somewhat unapproachable by educators.

Burke, himself, has not focused often on education per se, though socialization of human beings as symbol users is certainly uppermost in many of his writings. Yet when Burke does turn to education his remarks

are provocative. In On Human Behavior Considered Dramatistically (1965), Burke suggested that "a free society should emphasize, in its secular educational methods, the kind of observation that makes the building of hierarchical magic most difficult" (p . 294), because this magic encourages undue acquiescence and thus becomes too compatible with dictatorship. He was, in fact, suggesting that a form of analysis be taught young people so that they might function, not only as literary critics, but also as social critics. The implication is that the methods of literary criticism have application, not just in the fictions of human beings, but also in their day-to-day actions.

A Grammar of Motives (1962) explicates the format or structure through which dramatistic criticism (evaluation) of human activities, whether in literature or reality, can be undertaken. The five generating principles (act, scene, agent, agency, purpose), the "dramatistic pentad," provide the basic elements of analysis. Analysis of these five principles should, according to Burke, require one to consider all the important elements of a particular situation: the behavior, the person, the method, the motive, and the contextual forces. In a curriculum evaluation, for example, one would analyze the learning or teaching behaviors (act), the curriculum developers and/or implementers (agents), the planned experiences and materials (agency), the aims (purpose), and the context of learning (scene). From the pentad, Burke believes one can contrive unlimited tools for analysis (Knox, 1957, xxii).

The dramatistic method contains specified theoretical elements which appear to provide more direction for evaluation than approaches now used from anthropology and sociology. It also appears to offer a qualitative examination of processes not found in psychometrics. With these factors in mind, a study with the following objectives was begun:

1. To explore the applicability of Kenneth Burke's dramatistic criticism to curriculum evaluation.

2. To field test dramatistic criticism as an example of a theory-based, qualitative evaluation technique.

3. To demonstrate the degree to which dramatistic criticism can be applied to curriculum evaluation with the same rigor presumed traditionally applied quantitative approaches.

Procedure

The study consisted of four phases: (a) interpretation and summation, (b) translation, (c) application and refinement, (d) reconsideration. During the interpretation and summation phase, the most suitable of Burke's works were read and reread for clarification of the dramatistic method. The three most frequently reviewed texts were The Philosophy of Literary Form (1957) first published in 1941, A Grammar of Motives (1962), and A Rhetoric of Motives (1962). This review and summation can in no way be considered exhaustive. Others, who have dedicated years to such endeavor (Duncan, 1965), would no doubt find our work lacking in depth. Nevertheless, with numerous reviews, a working knowledge of the method was generated for translation to curriculum evaluation.

Preliminary judgments about the method were that it could and should be applied to both the planned curriculum (document) and to the curriculum as implemented and that it could and should be simplified so that terminology and procedures would not confuse the evaluators or the audience.

It became clear that in order to transfer Burkean criticism to curriculum evaluation it would have to be applied and discussed as if one were conducting an actual, rather than hypothetical evaluation. In a real situation the evaluators would be able to decide which terms helped elucidate elements of the curriculum and which seemed unproductive.

A preliminary list of terms for analytic focus was extracted and, after numerous discussions and debates, the investigators took to the field to apply the method "in situ."

The developers of a ninth grade humanities curriculum agreed to allow us to pilot and refine our criticism technique on their program. The newly implemented program is part of a four-year, integrated core curriculum for students in a new private metropolitan secondary school. The curriculum has had no previous external evaluation and the developers welcomed the assessment.

Copies of the curriculum document were obtained and reviewed. Comments and questions were recorded. Discussion of the document made it apparent that observations and interviews were a necessary part of the data gathering. A visitation schedule was arranged for two weeks, allowing additional visits as needed in later weeks. During the visits, evaluators observed large group lecture presentations, small group seminars, and teacher planning sessions. Observations of individual tutorial sessions were not scheduled because they were believed to be too obtrusive. Interviews were carried out with the program director and with the program developer, who was on temporary leave.

After each observation or interview the evaluators debriefed and reviewed verbatim notes and descriptions in relation to potentially descriptive/useful dramatistic terminology. Some terms of value in analyzing literary works were found to be of less merit when applied to programs and such terms were set aside. Other procedural and focusing terms productive of insight were retained. After the visitation was completed the current working vocabulary and format were established, though they are, by no means, to be viewed as totally refined.

The following pages contain the working vocabulary list and definitions, and an abbreviated version of the evaluation report. The report is com-

posed of (a) a prologue which briefly describes the program to be evaluated, the involved participants, and the general scene; (b) selected scenes which present summaries of the pentad components; (c) an epilogue of programmatic conclusions. Finally, the abbreviated dramatistic review is followed by a discussion and reconsideration of the application of the dramatistic method to curriculum evaluation work.

A Selected Dramatistic Vocabulary

Dramatism. A methodology for studying man's symbolic action to discern and evaluate the motives of man, based on dramatic terminology.

The Dramatistic pentad.

Act: Names what took place in thought and deed.

Scene: The background of the act, the situation, temporal and geographical, etc. in which it occurred.

Agent: What kind of person or persons performed the act.

Agency: What means or instrument the agent used.

Purpose: Why the act was done.

Attitude. The state of mind, incipient act of the agent, the manner in which an act is performed (a sixth principle).

Courtship. The use of suasive devices for the transcending of social estrangement (mystery).

Dialectical term. A term that requires an opposite to define it. We cannot locate its relative meaning with out reference to some polar or different concept.

Dramatic alignment. What is versus what symbolically in a rhetorical work, i.e., the material interests one symbolically, defends or appropriates, or aligns oneself with in the course of one assertions (god terms versus devil terms).

Ingratiation. The attempt to gain favor; style is ingratiation by "saying the right thing."

Mystery. Strangeness; mystery arises at that point where different kinds of beings are in communication; mystery keeps two people from completely communicating.

Orientation. The bundle of judgments and assumptions held about the way things were, are, and will be.

Piety. The sense of what goes with what.

Representive anecdote. This informative anecdote is a summation, containing implicitly what the system that is developed from it contains explicitly; a paradigm or prototype.

Strategies. A method of encompassing or approaching a situation; maneuvering; a document is a strategy for encompassing a situation; from where, through what, to what.

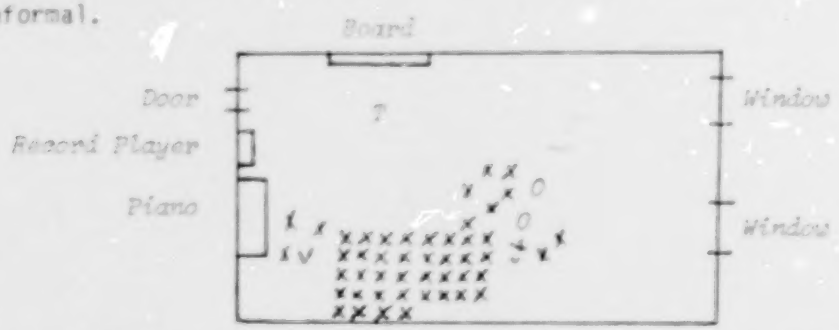
Watershed movement. Critical points within a work; changes of slope, where some new quality enters.

Curriculum Evaluation Report
(Abbreviated)

Prologue

The program evaluated is the integrated ninth grade humanities curriculum of the Northwest School of Arts, Humanities, and Environment. The program is in its first year of implementation, having been developed in 1979 through funds from a private philanthropic foundation. The humanities program is taught by a team of six teachers, each of whom offers expertise in literature, foreign language, music, art, or history. The program has three primary instructional components--large group presentations (2-4 hours a week), small group seminars (12-15 students), and individual tutorial (½ hour every other week). A broad historical overview of politics, economics, religion, art, music, and literature is provided to the approximately 60 students currently enrolled in this, the first of four years of humanities curricula, required of all students.

Scene 1: 8:35 a.m. Monday, 9 February 1981 in the theatre of the Northwest School. Students come in and set up folding chairs in the back half of the room; the lecturer stands in the front. The room is cold and was painted over the weekend. At several points during the lecture the door is opened from the outside by those curious about the outcome of the paint job (the walls are black and there are various colorful carpets on the floor). A portable blackboard is at the front of the room, but is difficult for most to see. Three postal-card- sized illustrations rest on the ledge of the blackboard--also difficult to see. A piano and record player are to the lecturer's right as he faces the class. Extra chairs, properties, and sundries are scattered to the lecturer's left. The atmosphere is friendly and informal.



Cast: 1 lecturer, 4 teachers, 50 students, 2 observers (NJG & SLB)

Act: Lecture demonstration on subject of medieval music

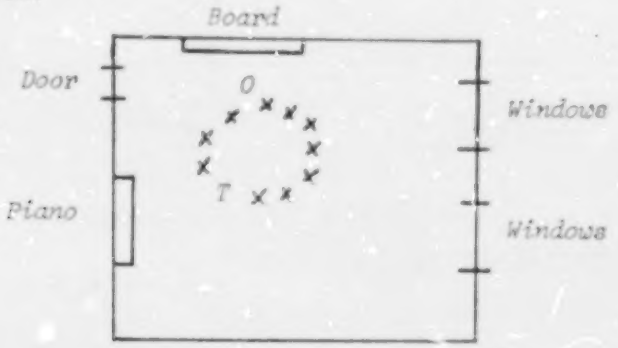
Agent: Humanities section leader acting as lecturer. This lecturer has expertise as a musician and teacher of music and music history.

Agency: Audial presentation--lecture, records, piano demonstrations

Purpose: Proximal--to transmit information about medieval music. Intermediate--to reinforce concepts regarding the Middle Ages. Distal--to provide a systematic and integrated examination of human history.

Strategies: Dramatic alignment; Conceptual juxtaposition of theoretical and practical musicians; conceptual juxtaposition of cathedral and castle; clergy and nobility.

Scene 3: 8:35 a.m., Tuesday, 10 February 1981 in the theater of the Northwest School. Students come in and sit on the floor or on chairs in a loose circle at the front of the room. The teacher sits on the floor in the circle and goes to the blackboard as necessary. The theater, is large and has a goodly amount of theatrical clutter--this class uses barely a fourth of the room.



Cast: 1 teacher, 10 students, 1 observer (SLB)

Act: Seminar session on Connecticut Yankee.

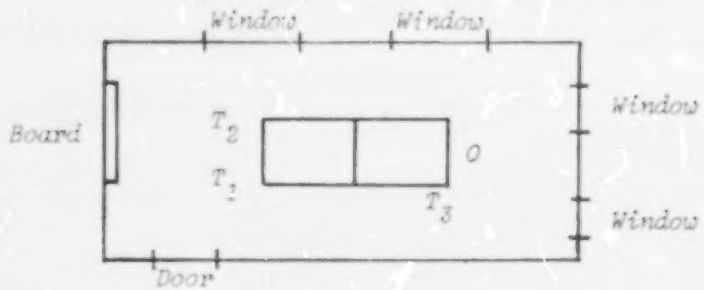
Agent: Humanities teacher

Agency: Discussion, convergent and divergent questions, student word lists, and text.

Purpose: Proximal--to begin discussion of Connecticut Yankee; to begin vocabulary lists based on Connecticut Yankee. Intermediate--to deal with a literary work about the middle ages. Distal--to provide for the examination of history through literature; to reinforce concepts relating to the Middle Ages.

Strategies: Dramatic alignment. Conceptual juxtaposition of Power and Progress (personal comfort) and of the actual and the fictionalized (Middle Ages/Connecticut Yankee; an asylum/One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest).

Scene 7: 12:15 p.m., Monday, 9 March 1981. This Humanities meeting took place in a second floor classroom. Large tables were pushed together in the middle of the room and teachers ate lunch during the informal meeting.



(Cast) Agents: Acting Director of the Humanities Program-T_1, 2 Humanities section leaders T_2 and T_3, 1 observer (SLB). The other two Humanities teachers were not present--one was ill and the other had a conflicting meeting.

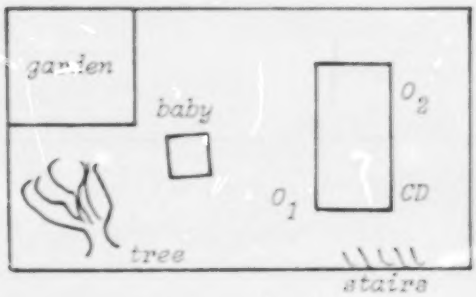
Act: Humanities planning meeting

Agency: Discussion

Purpose: Proximal--to plan schedules of Humanities Program for the following week; to create a one-hour examination for students on the Medieval Period and the Age of Exploration; to decide upon grading procedure for Connecticut Yankee papers. Intermediate--to reclassify and articulate teachers' own understanding of overriding concepts of periods of study just completed in order to plan for students. Distal--to continue movement toward ultimate goals of Humanities Program.

Strategies: Dramatic alignment: "Do the times make the machines or do the machines make the times?" T_2 Cathedral/castle; spiritualization/the secular; the preparation for a hereafter/life on earth--all represent conflicts--faith/scepticism. Watershed moment--the concept of the double edge--how that which creates horror and atrocity also creates artistry and beauty--"the kids are fascinated by this." T_1

Scene 8: An informal meeting between one of the developers of the Humanities Program and the investigators at 1:00 p.m. on Wednesday, 11 March 1981 at the developer's home. The day was warm so the meeting took place in the backyard over coffee, cake, and a napping baby.



(Cast) Agents--Curriculum Developer: 2 observers - NJG and SLB, interviewers; 1 baby (female).

Act: Meeting with curriculum developer.

Agency: Questioning and discussion

Purpose: To gain information about the Humanities Program as written--(the curriculum document) to ascertain the degree to which the curriculum document is representative of a dialectical instrument.

Outcomes: After two hours of discussion several issues became evident about the Humanities Program from the point of view of the developer:

Primary Strategy

1. Passion is of primary import--teachers and lecturers must treat their subjects with passion in order to keep students engaged.

Purpose

2. The ninth grades must be encouraged to "turn on" and be allowed to function intellectually. The program focuses on skill development in reading and writing and "plants the seeds of their [the students] cultural heritage."

3. The first half of the ninth grade year is planned to stress the acquisition of concepts, not chronological facts. Organizational elements are politics, economics, religion, intellect and artistry, social structures.

Purposes--distal

4. Overriding goals of ninth grade year are to give students:
   a. an understanding of basic terms.
   b. an understanding of concepts of western civilization through study of comparative mythology, comparative religion, social systems, etc.
   c. a sense of the universality and the uniqueness of humankind.
   d. time to develop a sense of themselves in relation to historical events.
   e. skills in the fundamentals of composition (critical and creative).
   f. enjoyment of reading.

Epilogue (Programmatic Conclusions)

1. As with anything that is new, this first year of the Humanities Program is experiencing some rough spots. The school is barely seven months old and the program is being taught by a newly formed team of teachers.

2. The formal aspects of the program lecture, seminar sessions, and tutorial conferences are being implemented as described in the curriculum document.

3. The physical setting described in the curriculum document (the lecture settings) has not yet been realized.

4. the organizing concepts of the program, which are clear to the developers, are often transmitted to teachers orally instead of through the curriculum document.

5. Primary programmatic concepts and goals appear to be agreed on by the developers and the teachers, and are presented to the students in lectures, seminar sessions, and tutorial conferences with considerable consistency. This is true despite the fact that the formal components of the program could change dramatically, depending upon the perspectives of individual teachers.

6. The academic atmosphere is informal and encourages student participation in lectures and seminar sessions.

7. The "dialectic," that is, the negotiated acceptance of the curriculum, appears to occur primarily in the seminar sessions rather than in lectures or the curriculum document itself.

8. The seminar session can be seen as the "representative anecdote" of the program as a whole and thus can provide an efficient vehicle through which evaluations can progress and present analyses.

9. The curriculum as written and presented is indeed highly "ingratiating," that is, it gains favor with students and teachers.

10. The program seems able to accommodate a wide variety of learning and teaching styles while compromising its goals and objectives little.

11. There was some discussion of eventual program modificiation based, in part, on teachers' perspectives. The investigators question whether possibilities exist for student suggested modification of the curriculum also.

12. Students seem, in some instances, to have the opportunity for choice of projects, but this choice is not articulated in the curriculum document.

13. There is a modeling process going on in the program. When teachers are excited, learning, and discovering (as they seem to be here), the students with whom they have contact will likewise be engaged.

> If we try to discover what the poem is doing for the poet we may discover a set of generalizations as to what poems do for everybody.
>
> (K. Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Form)

14. The program offers freshness, excitement, and continuing growth for the team of teachers. The teachers appear, in exchange, to be willing to expend considerable time and energy to teach effectively.

15. The program gives evidence of both teacher and student participation in a learning situation where no one is expected to be expert at all times and each is an authority at some time. This creates a supportive and tolerant learning environment.

16. The respect which teachers and students have for each other is fostered by mutual engagement in learning and not by the impositions of authority figures.

Methodological Conclusions and Implications

The investigators believe that the dramatistic pentad proved a useful tool for portrayal of the processes involved in the Humanities Program at the Northwest school of the Arts, Humanities, and Environment. It appears to be a tool that would prove equally useful for the portrayal of other curricula. Although the pentad has been used, thus far, solely from the teacher's point of view, student participation could also be portrayed (and in fact should be) in order to provide a more complete picture of any curriculum as it is taught.

The dramatistic vocabulary can be used to isolate and describe what is happening (the primary focus) in any class session. While the investigators chose, in this instance, not to contaminate the tutorials by the presence of outsiders, it is their belief that the dramatistic vocabulary is especially applicable to individual conferences and other "one-to-one" teaching/learning situations.

Many of the basic components of a dramatistic approach to curriculum evaluation could also prove useful and appropriate to analysis of teaching both in a comparative, external sense (are teachers 1, 2, and 3 presenting material similarly, stressing the same ideas, etc.) and as a tool with which teachers could assess their own performances and their students' perceptions.

By allowing for anecdotal as well as schematic portrayal of program, the dramatistic method provides a holistic way of looking at curriculum. It is noteworthy that the same method is appropriate for analysis of the curriculum document and for the curriculum as taught, and thus provides a way to determine the coincidence (or lack of coincidence) of major ideas in the document and in the classroom. Experience seems to indicate, however, that the method is more amenable to the analysis of classroom or class-like

(tutorial) activities and interactions, for when it was used to look at meetings (informational or decision making), the actual communication became the focus of attention rather than the process.

The requirement that a scene be described and a set diagrammed for each educational encounter portrayed, focuses attention on where and under what circumstances and/or conditions things happen. These are factors which, though often neglected, are as important as what is happening. Seminar sessions meeting on the final day of a term, for example, might legitimately be expected to be more tightly organized than sessions on other days.

The discovery and use of a "representative anecdote" that can portray a program seems an efficient way to analyze and present evaluative material. One of the strengths of this method, in fact, is the accessibility of evaluation results to administrators, teachers, students, parents, and other concerned parties. Evaluation (investigative) results can be displayed graphically and communicated in a vocabulary easily understood by both the professional and lay public. The method is believed appropriate for both formative and summative evaluation tasks, although summative evaluation should also make use of quantitative methods which could more adequately assess whether specific program goals (objectives) were being met.

The investigative process--how to apply dramatistic terminology, how to know what represents a "representative anecdote" or "piety" or "dramatic alignment"--was developed during the course of this project and was the result of discussion and negotiation. It is clear, however, that in order for dramatistic evaluation to represent more than an idiosyncratic experiment, vocabulary and presentational devices must somehow be shared with potential users. The basic diagrammatic format and the dramatistic vocabulary are elements that the investigators believe could be easily transmitted to others, yet it is obvious that at some time, definitions and

procedures might well have to be established by fiat. Although this will weaken the impact of the personal interpretations of any investigator (which can, of course, be included in report sections dealing with discussion), it seems necessary in order to be able to proceed with a degree of rigor. Certainly an outline of the process of an investigation based upon the dramatistic method would have to be available, in writing, to others if its use is to become more than a closely guarded secret. The investigators view the development of procedural guidelines as the next stage in their work with the dramatistic method.

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